

## Prerequisites for a Survey on the Social Representations of French in Iran

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### Abstract

Iran is a non-French-speaking country, but French was once widely practiced as a second language and has influenced Iranian culture and language. French is taught at Iranian universities from undergraduate to doctoral degrees. This study aims to answer two research questions: (1) What linguistic and cultural connotations are most frequently associated with the French language and culture among Iranian researchers? (2) How do Iranian researchers perceive the French language and culture, particularly in terms of its relevance to education? Using discourse analysis, this study examines the semantic connotations of words in academic works by Iranian researchers specializing in French studies from 2013 to 2023. The analysis focuses on peer-reviewed articles and conference papers addressing French as a foreign language (FLE) and French language education in Iran. The study reveals that French is perceived as a challenging yet prestigious and valuable language. This study serves as a foundation for further research on the social representations of French in Iranian universities. The findings contribute to the field of sociolinguistics by emphasizing the role of linguistic and cultural representations in language education and policy-making in Iran.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Social Representations, French Language Education, Discourse Analysis, Iran

### 1. Introduction

The term “Francophonie” (or “francophonie” in lowercase) is a multifaceted concept that unites countries and individuals sharing the French language (Erfurt, 2018). According to the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF), there are over 321 million French speakers worldwide. While Iran is not among the 88 member countries of the OIF, its history, culture, and language have been profoundly influenced by France and the French language. Several Iranian universities have been members of the Association of Francophone Universities (AUF). The sociolinguistic contact between France and Iran has been the subject of numerous studies, which can be grouped into two broad categories:

- 1- **Historical Relations:** Research on political, economic, cultural, and social relations between France and Iran during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 2- **Language Education:** Studies addressing French as a foreign language (FLE) in Iran, including its teaching methodologies and challenges faced by teachers and learners.

This study examines the social representations of the French language and culture in Iranian academia, particularly through the academic works of Iranian researchers over the past decade. By analyzing the semantic connotations of words used in these works, this literature review seeks to understand how French is perceived in the Iranian academic context. The research addresses the following questions:

1. What linguistic and cultural connotations are most frequently associated with the French language and culture among Iranian researchers?
2. How do Iranian researchers perceive the French language and culture, particularly in terms of its relevance to education?

By focusing on these questions, this study contributes to the field of the sociolinguistics of language-culture contact. It clarifies the role of social representations in shaping language planning and policy in Iran. This study also aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the status of the Francophonie in Iranian academia. This research sets the stage for further research, including an emic survey on the social representations of French in Iran, which is part of my doctoral thesis.

To contextualize this study, key terms such as “social representations” and “sociolinguistic contact” must be clarified. Social representations are socially constructed and shared forms of knowledge that guide social behavior and communication within a social group (Jodelet, 1989: 53). In the context of language, sociolinguistic representations determine how individuals relate to a language, its uses and its speakers (Boyer, 2017). The concept of “sociolinguistic contact” emphasizes that language contact occurs when conditions of social contact allow it, and it highlights the connection between linguistic, cultural, and social factors (Agresti, 2016). This theoretical framework provides the foundation for studying how Iranian researchers represent French in their works.

While a wealth of research exists regarding historical relations and language education of French in Iran, there is a gap in understanding how Iranian researchers themselves represent French in their academic works. This study fills this gap by analyzing their research papers.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Background**

### **2.1. Historical Perspective**

The historical relations between France and Iran provide an important context for understanding today's perceptions of the French language in Iran. Political and commercial relations between France and Iran date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, during this period, contacts between the two countries were largely limited to a small number of travelers, missionaries, and a few diplomats (Mokhberi, 2019). To trace the origins of “Iranian Francophonie,” we must go back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Qajar dynasty. This dynasty brought political stability to the country and pushed Iran towards modernity. It was during this period that the attention of foreign travelers, including the French, turned to Iran. As a result, many travelogues of this period contributed significantly to the knowledge of Iran and its culture abroad.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, more and more French texts were written about Iran, thanks to the efforts of French academics such as Jules Mohl, a diligent translator of Persian literature into French. These translations helped introduce this rich literary heritage to the French public. The intensification of cultural exchanges between France and Iran was accompanied by a fascination for Iranian culture in France at various levels. Many great

works of Persian literature and poetry have been translated into French, which has inspired some works by great writers such as Victor Hugo and André Gide (Djalili & Kellner, 2022). During this time, French held a prestigious status and was widely spoken among Iran's elite. It was the language of instruction at *Dar ol-Fonoun*, the country's first modern school. Additionally, French-language schools were established, and the Alliance Française operated in multiple Iranian cities. Furthermore, many Iranian students pursued their studies in France during this period, leading to the integration of numerous French words into the Persian language (Bertucat, 2019). French was the first foreign language taught in Iran before being supplanted by English after World War II (Moghaddam, 2019).

While an anti-Western current emerged in the last years of the Pahlavi dynasty, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 ended up marginalizing the French language and culture in Iran. Today, English and Arabic are the two mandatory foreign languages taught in schools in Iran, but French remains present at the university level.

This historical context shows the importance of France and the French language throughout history, and it is crucial for understanding how French is perceived today in Iran as a prestigious and important language.

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in two key concepts and phenomena: sociolinguistic contact and social representations.

### **2.2.1. Sociolinguistic Contact**

Language contact is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a social one, shaped by the conditions of interaction between societies (Simonin & Wharton, 2013). Terms like “linguistic contact,” “language contact,” and “language in contact” (Weinreich, 1953) are common; they present languages as tangible, substantial entities. Languages are portrayed as active subjects, comparable to social actors, which transform through contact with one another—seemingly independently from societies. Therefore, we use the term “sociolinguistic contact” (Agresti, 2016): language contact arises from social interactions, highlighting the interconnectedness of linguistic, cultural, and social factors. In the context of Iran, the sociolinguistic contact between French and Persian has been influenced by historical, cultural, and educational factors.

### **2.2.2. Social Representations**

Social representations are essential to sociolinguistic research on the relationship between the individual, society, and language. To study people's linguistic behavior, it is important to remember that it is not possible to study their linguistic behavior individually because “the individual is nothing without the society that invents him and provides him with a structured field for his actions, illusions, and destiny” (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998: 28). In the preface to *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1982), Émile Durkheim explicitly states, “social life is entirely made up of representations.” It is through these representations, which are “guides for action” (Abric, 2011: 11), that we understand the world around us. Social representations are a form of knowledge, socially constructed and shared, and they contribute to the creation

of a common reality within a social group. In fact, social representations guide social behavior and communication (Jodelet, 1989: 53). This concept of representations plays a particularly important role in identity construction and explains how individuals act within society.

Sociolinguistic representations are part of social representations. Henry Boyer (2017:62) specifies that sociolinguistic representations determine how individuals relate to a language, its uses, and its speakers. For example, French may be perceived as a “prestigious” language due to its historical context and association with literature and diplomacy or as a “complex” language due to its complex grammar and phonetics. Social representations are associated with various concepts, such as opinion and attitude.

#### **2.2.2.1. Opinion and Attitude**

Opinions and attitudes are closely related to social representations. When we express our feelings or thoughts about a subject, we essentially express our opinions. An attitude is “a higher-order cognitive formation” (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998: 22) that influences our behaviors, ways of thinking, and perceptions of the world (Girandola & Fointiat, 2016). Rouquette & Rateau (1998:24) describe it as a “specific form of occurrence of a social representation or a combination of representations.” In the Dictionary of Linguistics and Language Sciences published by Larousse, it is observed that “language attitudes refer to the collection of explicit or implicit opinions held by individuals or groups concerning the use of a particular language (Dubois et al., 2012: 57). An individual with a positive opinion of a language is more likely to choose to learn it as a second or third language. In the context of this study, Iranian researchers’ opinions toward French may vary between admiration for its cultural prestige and frustration with its linguistic difficulty. These social representations, opinions, and attitudes are identifiable through a discourse analysis, which can reveal the underlying perceptions expressed in the written texts.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Discourse Analysis**

Discourse serves as the natural environment in which social representations are formed, expressed, and disseminated across society (Py, 2004). Therefore, by examining the semantic connotations and lexical choices employed by the authors, the discourse analysis can uncover their implicit or explicit opinions and attitudes toward the French language and culture.

Discourse is not individual. It is shaped and influenced by collective forces, going beyond individual speech (Mazière, 2005/2016: 9). Discourse is a product defined by the conditions in which it is produced and by the interpretation and meaning given to it by the analyst (*Ibid.*). A discourse does not only describe a preexisting reality but creates a representation of the reality that the writer/speaker wishes to share with the reader/listener. As a result, for most language specialists, to state a discourse is to aim to influence others. Consequently, the objective of a discourse is an attempt to influence others (Seignour, 2011). Discourse analysis is then an approach that allows us to study discourse in a precise way.

With discourse analysis established as the methodology for identifying social representations of French in Iranian academic works, the next step is to describe the process of gathering the data for this analysis.

### 3.2 Search Strategy

A vast and growing body of published research is available on the subject of this literature review: "French in Iran." The selection process was guided by a search strategy to ensure that the chosen studies were directly relevant to the research questions and objectives. Below is an explanation of the search strategy:

- 1. Relevance to Research Objectives:** This paper focuses only on research addressing the issue of French as a foreign language in Iran, the teaching of this language, and the challenges faced by its teachers and learners. Specifically, articles were selected if they examined the representations of French and their influences on the teaching and learning process.
- 2. Time Frame:** Articles published between 2013 and 2023 were selected to ensure that the literature review reflects recent trends in the social representations of French in Iran.
- 3. Publication type and Quality:** The review exclusively considers studies from academic journals and conferences to ensure academic rigor and credibility.
- 4. Authorship and Context:** Another inclusion criterion is selecting studies specifically published by Iranian researchers based in Iran, as these provide the most relevant insights into the perception of French in the Iranian context.

#### 3.2.1. Databases

I consulted several academic databases to conduct a comprehensive literature review and find related articles.

- 1. Google Scholar** was the primary database used for this study due to its extensive coverage of academic sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, theses, and conference papers.
- 2. CIVILICA** is a Publisher of Iranian conference papers and scientific journal articles. It is valuable for accessing research conducted by Iranian researchers, which is central to this study.
- 3. JREF.ir (Journal Reference)** is a joint member of CIVILICA publications and focuses on Iranian academic journals.
- 4. SID.ir (Scientific Information Database)** is one of the largest Iranian databases for scientific research, covering more than 821,000 journal papers.
- 5. Ensani.ir** is a database specializing in humanities research. It provides access to more than 450,000 full-text scientific papers from more than 1,700 journals.

In addition to these databases, I used citation searching to identify relevant studies cited in the reference lists of sources.

#### 3.2.2. Search Terms

The research objectives guided the selection of search terms, which focus on exploring the social representations of French in academic works by Iranian researchers. These keywords

are central to understanding perceptions of French in Iranian academia: “francophonie,” “social representations,” “French in Iran,” “FLE (Français Langue Étrangère),” “French education in Iran,” “French language,” “learning French,” “French in Iranian academia,” and “Iranian perception of French.”

I conducted searches in French, English, and Persian to ensure that no relevant studies were overlooked. This multilingual approach allowed me to access a diverse range of studies. While the majority of the studies on this subject are in French, I also included one study in English and one in Persian.

### **3.2.3. Selected Studies**

Considering the vast number of studies on French in Iran, I initially selected articles based on title and abstract to remove irrelevant ones. Next, I read the full texts of the remaining studies to confirm their relevance. From the initial 46 articles identified through the search strategy, 12 were ultimately selected for this literature review. These 12 studies not only meet all the criteria of the search strategy but also provide insight into how French is represented from the perspective of the author. The articles are listed in Table 1.

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Autour(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Language</b>
1	<i>Le rôle des représentations dans la formation des enseignants de FLE en Iran</i>	Ladan Ghafoori Parivash Safa Rouhollah Rahmatian	2015	French
2	Explicit grammar in FLE classes besides communicative methods	Nazita Azimi-Meibodi Zohreh Joozdani	2016	French
3	The impact of social representations on teaching of grammar in the courses of French as a foreign language in Iran	Akbar Abdollahi, Bita Hashemianejad	2017	French
4	<i>Universel ou contextualisé : quel choix de manuels d'enseignement du FLE pour le système scolaire iranien ?</i>	Zahra Davarpanah Rouhollah Rahmatian Parivash Safa	2019	French
5	<i>L'alternance codique langue maternelle/langue étrangère (FLE) : stéréotypes et réalités d'un besoin pédagogique dans le contexte iranien</i>	Leila Shobeiry Nezhla Yabandeh	2020	French
6	A comparative Study of Three Languages (English, Persian and French) in Teaching French Grammar (Case Study, Frequency of Adverbs)	Milad Mahdavipour	2021	English

7	Educational usage of French Loanwords in Lesson Zero of French Methods	Rouhollah Rezapour, Fatemeh Khamoush	2022	Persian
8	<i>Analyses contrastives de l'orthographe française (L'enseignement du français en Iran)</i>	Allahshokr Assadollahi	2022	French
9	Motivations and Learning Attitudes Towards French among Iranian University Students	Hadisehalsadat Mousavi Matin Vesal	2022	French
10	<i>Facteurs affectant l'apprentissage de la grammaire</i>	Mahdi Afkhaminia Vahideh Nassirzadeh	2022	French
11	The exploitation of literary texts for the development of pragmatic competence of French learners in Iran	Seyedeh Yasamin Sajjadi Roya Letafati Mahmoud Reza Gashmardi Parivash Safa	2020	French
12	Reimagining the Teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) in Post-Pandemic Iran: The Evolution of Pedagogical Practices in Hybrid Learning Spaces	Hadisehalsadat Mousavi Saber Mohseni	2023	French

Table 1. Selected studies

#### **4. Studies Analysis**

In this section, the data from the selected studies will be analyzed and interpreted based on the discourse analysis framework. All the studies analyzed here address the challenges and opportunities in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE) in Iran. There are similarities in how the articles approach the subject from different angles. For instance, several articles explore the impact of linguistic differences between Persian and French on learners' acquisition of French, especially in grammar and orthography learning (Assadollahi, 2022; Afkhaminia & Nassirzadeh, 2022; Shobeiry & Yabandeh, 2020). Some articles analyze the role of teacher training, the effectiveness of teaching methodologies, and pedagogical practices in the Iranian context (Abdollahi & Hashemianejad, 2017; Rezapour & Khamoush, 2022; Mousavi & Mohseni 2023). Some studies highlighted the historical and contemporary significance of French in Iran, recognizing the importance of French culture and literature for Iranian learners (Mousavi & Vesal, 2022), its role in diplomatic relations, and academic pursuit (Mousavi & Mohseni, 2023).

Studies employ both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative data is gathered mainly through interviews, text and discourse analysis, and observations, to gain an in-depth understanding of specific subjects, while quantitative data is collected through surveys and questionnaires, to identify patterns and trends.

In the following sections, I will discuss words used by the authors to describe the French language and culture in the selected articles. They use a variety of adjectives, words, and phrases to describe French.

#### **4.1. Key Semantic Themes**

The studies highlight several recurring semantic themes used by researchers to describe the French language:

##### **4.1.1. Difficulty and Complexity**

A recurring theme in the analyzed studies is the perception of French as a difficult language to learn. For example, Ghafoori et al. (2015) describe French as a “difficult language to learn.” Some of the challenges mentioned in this paper are the grammar and linguistic representations of French teachers, who view French grammar as a difficult system to teach. Similarly, Azimi-Meibodi & Joozdani (2016) highlight grammar as “*difficile*” (difficult), while Abdollahi & Hashemianejad (2017) elaborate that French grammar is perceived as “*plus difficile et plus compliquée*” (more difficult and more complex) than other foreign languages. Shobeiry & Yabandeh (2020) further emphasize that French grammar and conjugation are “*les vraies difficultés*” (the real difficulty) of learning this language.

This perception extends beyond grammar. Studies by Mahdavipour (2021), Rezapour & Khamoush (2022), Assadollahi (2022), Mousavi & Vesal (2022), and Afkhaminia & Nassirzadeh (2022) also emphasize the challenges of French phonology and orthography. For instance, Assadollahi (2022) describes French orthography as difficult to Iranian learners due to its differences from Persian : “L’enseignement du français, surtout la grammaire et l’orthographe pour les étudiants iraniens, semble être confrontées à des problèmes cruciaux dus à la fois à la structure de la langue de départ, le persan, qui a ses propres caractéristiques syntaxiques, phonétiquesi...” (the teaching of French, particularly grammar and spelling for Iranian students, appears to face significant challenges due to the structure of Persian, which has its own syntactic and phonetic characteristics). These findings suggest that the perception of French as an intellectually demanding language is a significant barrier for Iranian learners, influencing teaching methodologies and student motivation.

##### **4.1.2. Beauty**

French is also described as a beautiful and pleasant language despite its perceived difficulty. Assadollahi (2022) characterizes French as a musical language: “ Étant une langue qui a un aspect musical et d’harmonie, le français possède une bonne source homophonique ” (as a language with a musical and harmonious quality, French possesses a rich source of homophony). These descriptions suggest a cultural admiration for French, which may serve as a motivation for learners. For example, in Ghafoori et al. (2015), 22% of participants in a survey on the teachers’ representations of French described it as “une belle langue à entendre et à parler” (a beautiful language to hear and speak). Such descriptions show how the aesthetic qualities contribute to the language education.

##### **4.1.3. Utility**

Another theme is the practical utility of French. Azimi-Meibodi & Joozdani (2016) describe French as a skill to find a job : “les apprenants apprennent le FLE non pas par intérêt

personnel ou passe-temps mais plutôt comme une discipline universitaire leur servant plus tard à trouver un métier : d'où la nécessité d'une bonne maîtrise du français" (students learn French not for personal interest or as a hobby, but rather as an academic discipline that will later help them secure a job. This highlights the importance of mastering the French language effectively). Similarly, Mahdavipour (2021) emphasizes the role of French in "the dissemination of science, awareness, knowledge, and technology in the world," portraying it as a "widespread and effective language" and a useful tool for professional advancement. This theme is further supported by Mousavi & Vesal (2022), who note that students are motivated to learn French for employment opportunities and travel. For instance, 5 students remarked "je pense que parler français sera un avantage dans ma carrière ; j'aimerais voyager en France ; dans mon domaine, parler français est un atout." Moreover, Mousavi & Mohseni (2023) highlight the diplomatic and commercial significance of French in the world, stating that French "en tant que langue internationale de diplomatie et de commerce, détient une importance particulière" (as an international language of diplomacy and commerce, it holds particular importance).

#### **4.1.4. Communication and Cultural Prestige**

French is also represented as a bridge for communication and cultural exchange. Sajjadi et al. (2020) argue that "dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, avec le développement des réseaux de communication, il devient de plus en plus important d'apprendre la langue d'autres peuples" (in today's world, with the development of communication networks, learning the language of other people is becoming increasingly important). Ghafoori et al. (2015) highlight the role of French in facilitating cultural and linguistic exchanges, noting that it is considered a high-demand language in Iranian language institutions, ranking after English and Arabic.

Moreover, French is associated with high cultural prestige and a rich literary tradition. Mousavi & Vesal (2022) observe that "les étudiants ont un intérêt prononcé pour la culture et la littérature françaises, ce qui contribue à leur motivation pour l'apprentissage de la langue" (students have a strong interest in French culture and literature, which contributes to their motivation for learning the language). Davarpanah et al. (2019) criticize "l'insignifiance de la mise en œuvre des éléments de la culture française dans l'élaboration des manuels du FLE en Iran" (the insignificance of French cultural elements in *FLE* textbooks in Iran) and emphasize the importance of culture in learning French as a foreign language. Similarly, Azimi-Meibodi & Joozdani (2016) highlight the importance of "cultural, social, historical, artistic, etc., knowledge" in the learning process.

### **4.2. Lexical Choices**

The lexical choices made by Iranian researchers in their academic works reveal their cultural and pedagogical attitudes and their perceptions of the French language and culture. These choices are characterized by a variety of adjectives, adverbs, metaphors, and evaluative connotations that show the challenges and the appeal of French.

#### **4.2.1. Adjectives and Adverbs**

Researchers frequently use adjectives and adverbs to describe French, often highlighting its difficulty and beauty. For example, Ghafoori et al. (2015) describe French grammar as

“difficile” (difficult) and the language itself as “belle” (beautiful). Similarly, (Abdollahi & Hashemianejad, 2017) use terms like “beaucoup de règles” (many rules) and “plus compliquée” (more complex) to emphasize the structural challenges of French. other descriptors include “un peu spéciale” (a little special), “assez différente” (quite different), “un peu plus détaillé” (a little more detailed), “beaucoup d’exceptions” (many exceptions), “difficile d’apprendre” (difficult to learn), and “Codifiée” (codified), which convey a sense of rigidity and difficulty.

On the other hand, positive descriptors such as “aspect musical et d’harmonie” (musical and harmonic aspect) (Assadollahi, 2022) and “une belle langue à entendre et à parler” (a beautiful language to hear and to speak) (Ghafoori et al., 2015) illustrate the aesthetic appeal of French. These adjectives and adverbs show the duality of French as challenging and rewarding.

#### **4.2.2. Metaphors**

Metaphorical language is also employed to describe the process of learning and teaching French. For instance, Azimi-Meibodi & Joozdani (2016) describe French not as a “passe-temps” (pastime) or “l’intérêt personnel” (personal interest) but as “un moyen pour trouver un métier” (a tool to find a job). These metaphors position French as a practical skill in professional contexts.

#### **4.2.3. Evaluative Connotations**

The lexical choices in the analyzed studies also carry evaluative connotations. Words like “complexe” (complex), “pénible” (painful), “difficile” (difficult), and “désagréable” (unpleasant) reflect the perceived difficulty of French in grammar and orthography. On the other hand, terms such as “belle” (beautiful), “musical” (musical), “harmonique” (harmonic), “utile” (useful), and “précieux” (precious) show admiration for the cultural qualities. These evaluative connotations also reveal the duality in the representations of French among researchers as both a demanding and prestigious language.

### **4.3. Dichotomy Between French and Persian Representations**

The studies reveal a strong dichotomy between the representations of French and Persian, particularly in terms of grammar. This dichotomy influences how French is taught and learned in Iran.

#### **4.3.1. Grammar**

French grammar is portrayed as more complex and codified than Persian grammar. For example, Abdollahi & Hashemianejad (2017) argue that French grammar is more difficult and complex due to features like gender and exceptions. Mahdavipour (2021) highlights that “the depth of language differences determines the severity of the difficulty of teaching French to non-French speakers.”

Assadollahi (2022) emphasizes this dichotomy by analyzing orthographic differences, arguing that “the teaching of French, especially grammar and spelling, for Iranian students

seems to face crucial challenges due to the structure of their native language, Persian.” This study describes Persian grammar as “much less complicated compared to French” and concludes that “French is a language quite far from Persian.” Afkhaminia & Nassirzadeh (2022) compare these two languages and argue that there are not so many “systematic similarities” between them; hence, Iranian students have “big problems” in the learning process.

#### **4.3.2. Implications for Teaching**

The dichotomy between French and Persian has implications for teaching. Shobeiry & Yabandeh (2020) advocate using Persian in French classrooms to simplify learning: “l’emploi de la langue maternelle en classe de FLE, a été reconnu comme un élément accélérateur et simplifiant pour les apprenants iraniens” (The use of the mother tongue in the French language classroom has been recognized as a facilitating and simplifying element for Iranian learners). They argue that code-switching between Persian and French can be a useful pedagogical method for explaining complex grammatical concepts.

### **4.4. Dichotomy Between Communicative and Structural Representations**

The studies analyzed demonstrate a significant dichotomy between communicative and structural approaches to teaching French in Iran. This dichotomy reveals representations of French and its implications for pedagogy.

#### **4.4.1. Communicative Approach**

The communicative approach emphasizes the practical use of French for communication and professional development.

Ghafoori et al. (2015) argue that teachers often focus on the structural aspects of French while being “indifferent” to its “communicative values”. Mousavi & Vesal (2022) highlight the importance of communication, stating that students are motivated to learn French for purposes such as finding a job or traveling to France. However, they face difficulties achieving these objectives due to limited opportunities to practice conversation.

#### **4.4.2. Structural Approach**

In contrast, the structural approach prioritizes the explicit teaching of grammar. Iranian universities have traditionally favored a structural-based pedagogy focused on grammar. Abdollahi & Hashemianejad (2017) observe that most teachers “follow a deductive, explicit approach” and concentrate on “traditional grammar.” Assadollahi (2022) indicates that French grammar “cause pas mal de problème” (poses quite a few problems) for Iranian students, describing it as a “major obstacle” to learning French. However, the study also acknowledges that grammar is necessary for mastering the language.

#### **4.4.3. Blend of Approaches**

Two studies advocate for a blended strategy that combines the communicative and structural methods. For instance, Abdollahi & Hashemianejad (2017) study the view of some teachers who consider grammar to be “an important language component knowledge” that is “necessary” to “communicate well” in a foreign language. Similarly, Azimi-Meibodi &

Joozdani (2016) argue that the best method is to blend communicative and structural approaches, because “le principal objectif de ces méthodes est d’augmenter, chez l’apprenant, la capacité d’agir dans les domaines variés de la société” (the main objective of these methods is to increase the learner’s ability to act in various areas of society).

The reviewed studies present a view of French as both a communication tool and a complex set of rules. These findings address the research questions and provide insights into the social representations of French. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential biases inherent in these studies. The main focus on the challenges of teaching and learning French may reflect the researchers’ experiences as educators or students.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study aimed to find the traces that representations have left in the discourse, as discourse is considered the place where representations are revealed and take shape: “Representations are objects of discourse that are constructed through interaction, facilitated by language and the meditation of others, and observable through discursive traces” (Castellotti et al., 2001: 103). This literature review has explored the social representations of French in Iran, as reflected in academic works by Iranian researchers over the past decade. The analysis focused on the semantic connotations of the words used to describe the French language and culture. Additionally, this study aimed to identify the similarities and differences across the selected research.

### **5.1. Key Findings**

The discourse analysis reveals multifaceted perceptions of the French language and culture among Iranian researchers. French is perceived as a linguistically challenging and culturally prestigious language. Researchers frequently described French as “difficult” and “complex” due to its complex grammar and linguistic structure, yet it is also recognized as “beautiful,” “prestigious,” and a valuable tool for communication and professional advancement. These representations highlight a duality in how French is approached in Iranian academia: as a language that is difficult to learn but also offers cultural and literary richness.

### **5.2. Implications for Teaching**

The objective of these studies was primarily to contribute to improving the teaching strategies of French in Iran. The perception of French as both challenging and prestigious suggests a dual pedagogical approach. For instance, the representation of French grammar as “difficult” emphasizes the need for explicit grammar teaching, while cultural appreciation highlights the importance of integrating cultural elements into the lessons.

### **5.3. Future Research Directions**

This study sets the stage for further research on the social representations of French in Iran. Future research could examine the impact of these representations on pedagogical strategies and teaching practices in Iranian universities. For instance, how do administrators and policymakers perceive the role of French in Iran’s educational system? Such studies would provide valuable insights for improving French language education in Iran and contribute to the field of sociolinguistics.

#### 5.4. Significance of the Findings

This study's findings have significant implications for language education and policy in Iran. By understanding how Iranian researchers represent French, educators and policymakers can develop more effective teaching strategies that address the linguistic challenges and cultural admirations of learning French. Furthermore, these insights could inform language policy decisions, such as allocating resources for French studies and developing teacher training programs.

#### 6. Declaration of Interest Statement

I declare that I have no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this paper.

#### 7. Bibliography

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